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MEMORIAL VOLUME FOR THE ASSYRIAN MARTYRS

7 • AUGUST • 1988

ON ASSYRIAN MARTYRS DAY

What is the meaning of our Martyrs Day and why do we observe it?

On the seventh of August, we Assyrians remember the wounds of our nation. We recount endless tales of our martyrs through the ages. From the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. until today, our people have continually undergone suffering as a result of their identity and their efforts to preserve it.

We have been ravaged and massacred at the hands of Shapur II, Tamerlane, Badr Khan Beg, Nurallah Beg, Simko, and other tyrants. We have endured misery under the rule of the Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Persians. We have been tormented in the Hakkari mountains, the plains of Urmi, and in the cities of northern Bet-Nahrain. Our people have been robbed, raped, killed, and desecrated. Bitter memories have lived in the minds of many of our generations from the cradle to the grave.

In 1933, after our people had undergone almost total annihilation in World War I, and after they had endured the hardships of refugees, they came upon the painful encounter that was the Simmel massacre. Thousands of our defenseless men, women, and children were shot and bayoneted in and around the village of Simmel in cold blood by the cowardly Iraqi army.

But Simmel and the killings that followed were not the end of our sufferings. The Assyrian people will not forget the day that Youbert Shlemon, Youkhana Jajjo, and Yousip Zibari were tortured and executed in an Iraqi prison. They had resisted the racist Arabization policies of the Iraqi government and preached the preservation of their nation and culture. They embraced death as Assyrians.

The sacrifice of these young men, over fifty years after the massacre at Simmel, attests to the strong spirit of our small and ancient nation. We possess little more than the existence of our heritage in this world. In order to preserve it, we have given countless lives and endured numerous wounds. We thus consider it priceless.

On the seventh of August, let us honor those whose blood has made possible the passing of this golden heritage unto us; and let us resolve to make ourselves worthy of their sacrifices by increasing our efforts to preserve our identity today and in the future.

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THE AUGUST MASSACRES

The following account of the massacre of the Assyrians at Simmel in August 1933 was written by Lt.-Col. R. S. Stafford, the British administrative inspector for Mosul during this period. It was published in his book *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* London, 1935. pp. 171-181.

Simmel is on the main road to Zakho, about eight miles from Dohuk, under the administration of which qodha it came. It was the largest village in the neighbourhood and consisted of over one hundred Assyrians and ten Arab houses. The total population would have been about 700, most of the Assyrians belonging to the Baz tribe, with others of the Upper Tiyari and the Diz. The headman was a strong supporter of the Mar Shimun and with fifty others had followed Yacu into Syria. These fifty were almost entirely Tiyari, hardly any of the Baz being among them. The feeling of unrest in the village increased. On August 8th the Qaimaqam of Zakho appeared with a lorry full of soldiers. No satisfactory answer has yet been given to the question why he should have come with troops into a district that was outside his administration. He entered the village and told the Assyrians to surrender their rifles, as he feared that fighting might occur between the rebel Assyrians and the Government forces, in which case the people of Simmel would be less likely to be involved if they had no rifles. Plausibly, but with lies in his heart, he assured them that they would be safe under the protection of the Iraqi flag which flew over the police post—for Simmel, being a large village, had a police post of one sergeant and four men. The Assyrians then handed in their arms, which were taken away by the troops.

Next day more troops returned, this time without the Qaimaqam, and disarmed further Assyrians who in the meantime had come in from the surrounding villages. The following day, the 10th, passed comparatively quietly. Nothing happened except that Arabs and Kurds could be seen looting neighbouring villages. They even came in and stripped the communal threshing floors on the outskirts of Simmel, where the cut barley and wheat was stacked

in piles, for it was full time of harvest and the villagers were engaged in threshing and winnowing. The unarmed Assyrians could do nothing and the police did not intervene; they explained that they had no orders and that in any case their numbers were insufficient.

It was becoming quite clear now to the Assyrians what was likely to happen. Not only had they seen this looting going on, but they suddenly found they were forbidden to draw water from the village spring, being permitted only to go to the main stream, which was dirty. They knew that the Army had already shot many Assyrians. They had seen their head priest, Sada, taken out of Simmel. All day they watched the looting Arabs and Kurds. Not one of them dared to move from the neighbourhood of the police post, except one or two whose houses were near by, and who went to and fro on pathetic household tasks such as the making of bread, the last meal that many of them were destined to eat. They were now in a state of deadly fear, and they spent that night in and around the police post, which is built on a small hill. They now knew only too well the sentiments which the Arabs, and particularly the Arab Army, harboured towards them, and in the small hours of the 11th, when the moon had risen, the watching Assyrians began to observe their Arab neighbours of the village starting away driving their flocks before them. This opened their eyes beyond possibility of error. They realized the trap they had been led into and they knew that they were entirely helpless.

The police sergeant ordered the Assyrians from the outlying villages to return to their homes. When they refused, saying that it was unsafe, he ordered them to leave the police post and go down to the houses in the villages below. They obeyed reluctantly. Some went to the house of Gavriel and his brother Tinan, who kept reassuring them that they would be safe and that the Government would protect them. As others were going down to the houses they suddenly saw lorries of troops and armoured cars arriving. Looking round to the police post they saw a policeman pulling down the Iraqi flag, which until then had been flying, as it had flown for years, as a symbol of the law and order under which every inhabitant of Iraq could live in safety and security. Suddenly and without the least warning the troops

opened fire upon the defenceless Assyrians. Many fell, including some women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover. Not a soul was to be seen in the streets. The troops well knew that there was not a rifle or revolver left in the village. An officer then drove up in a car and the troops came in. This officer has since been identified as Ismail Abawi Tohalla, who comes of a well-known but by no means respectable Mosul family. He shouted to the soldiers not to kill the women and children. These were ordered to come out of the houses and go up to the police post. Many did so.

A cold-blooded and methodical massacre of all the men in the village then followed, a massacre which for the black treachery in which it was conceived and the callousness with which it was carried out, was as foul a crime as any in the blood-stained annals of the Middle East. The Assyrians had no fight left in them, partly because of the state of mind to which the events of the past week had reduced them, largely because they were disarmed. Had they been armed it seems certain that Ismail Abawi Tohalla and his bravos would have hesitated to take them on in fair fight. Having disarmed them, they proceeded with the massacre according to plan. This took some time. Not that there was any hurry, for the troops had the whole day ahead of them. Their opponents were helpless and there was no chance of any interference from any quarter whatsoever. Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge, and having trained them on the terror-stricken wretches in the crowded rooms, fired among them until not a man was left standing in the shambles. In some other instances the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form, and men were dragged out and shot or bludgeoned to death and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead.

Gavriel, who has been mentioned in an earlier chapter as the individual who raised cheers for the Army at the Mosul meeting of July 11th, went out to plead for the Assyrians. He explained who he was, and said that his nephew, Ezra Effendi, had long been an officer in the Iraqi police. He showed his nationality papers, but these were torn in pieces before his face and he was shot in cold blood. A priest named Ismail who had taken refuge in the

police post was driven out by the police, a rope was tied round his neck and he was kicked down the steps and dragged away by the troops, who shot him, afterwards throwing his body on the steadily growing heap of corpses. Whilst this organized slaughter was going on, the police sergeant, who had from the beginning taken a leading part in the diabolical plot, ordered the Assyrian women to clean up the blood from the neighbourhood of the police post. The women complied, but only for a time. Suddenly they rebelled against this inhuman order and told the police sergeant to turn the machine guns on them as they would rather die. The soldiers then took the men that remained down to a ditch and went on killing until every man was dead. It was then discovered that a few men had taken refuge among the women and that some of them had hastily got into women's clothes. These were rounded up and murdered.

When there was no one left to kill, the troops took their departure. This was about two p.m., and they went off to Aloka for their midday meal and afternoon siesta. As soon as the troops had gone, the tribes, who had been interested spectators, came in and completed the looting of the houses which the soldiers had commenced. The tribes had taken no part whatever in the massacre, but as the Army were equipped with modern machine guns and had no opposition, there was of course no need for any help. Later in the evening the troops came back, for the police sergeant had reported by telephone that a number of Assyrian men had appeared at the police post and taken refuge there. These were hunted out and killed. The shooting went on until about sunset. In the meantime the other houses in the village were crowded with weeping, terror-stricken women and small children. Few of them had any meal that night or for the next few days, for what grain there was in the village had been removed by the Kurds, who had also gone round the houses removing cookery utensils, bedding, and in some cases even the roof beams.

Next morning the women, already distracted beyond all reason, had a further shock when they saw the Army returning, for they did not know what this might portend. The Army, however, had merely come back to bury the dead. The bodies were collected and placed in a shallow

ditch. It must be remembered that the month was August with a daily sun maximum of 160 degrees Fahrenheit! According to the military report 305 men, four women, and six children were buried. Many of the killed were little more than half-grown boys. Some other twenty women and children were wounded. I myself saw later one child who had been shot in both wrists as he was being held in the arms of his father who was killed. That night and the subsequent nights some of the women were raped by the police sergeant and the soldiers. Doing everything possible to minimize what had happened, the Arabs have stated that no such incidents occurred. This is a lie. All that can be said is that throughout these terrible days there were fewer outrages on women than would have been expected. It was also everywhere stated at the time that this massacre was the work of the tribes and the irregular police. This, too, is a lie. It was the work of the Iraqi Army, disciplined troops under the direct command of their officers, the troops responsible for practically all the killing being the motor machine-gun detachments, while other troops who were passing the village throughout the day did nothing to stop what was going on.

Bekir Sidqi himself, who was to be acclaimed by the Baghdad mob as a conquering hero, and—what was even worse—was later decorated and promoted by the Iraqi Government, was not in Simmel but spent that day in Mosul, though there is no question but that he planned the whole affair. Indeed, it was subsequently admitted that the Army, had it not been prevented, had intended to carry out a similar massacre of Alqosh, and that the reports that Assyrian rebels had entered that village had been deliberately spread about to afford an excuse.

The burial in the shallow ditch, which was carried out most inefficiently, caused the stench under the burning sun to become almost unendurable, and every fly and pestilential insect for miles around was drawn to the village. In this unspeakable atmosphere there lived for six days one thousand terrified women and children who had seen all their male relations killed before their eyes. All they had to eat was a few dried water-melon seeds and they had scanty water. Even at night they had little sleep, for they did not know what might be coming next, and their dreadful experiences

led them to put little trust in the protestations of the police that they were quite safe and that nothing more would happen. A little bread was sent from Dohuk, but nothing on an adequate scale was done until Hikmet Beg Suleiman himself on the 15th arrived in the village and was overcome by what he saw. As soon as he returned doctors and sanitary men were sent to Simmel, and the bodies were decently and properly re-interred. When I visited Simmel myself with Major Thomson on August 17th few traces could be seen of what had occurred, but the sight of the women and children is one which I shall never forget—and I spent more than three years in the trenches in France! That day the women and children were removed to Dohuk, and thence, as there was no proper accommodation, to Mosul, where they were placed under canvas in a camp, which will be described later. Every effort was made to hush up what had occurred and a censorship for a time imposed on outgoing letters. It was soon seen, however, that the killing could not be kept secret, for the Christians in the north had sent the news abroad, and in the nature of things an affair of this kind was bound to get out. In fact, the details were published in the Beyrouth newspapers before they were known in Mosul. So the Baghdad Government began to admit that there had been a slaughtering of the Assyrians, but they threw the blame on the tribes and the irregular police. Later this was found to be useless, and Yasin Pasha, the Iraqi delegate to Geneva, had to admit that the excesses had been committed by the regular Army. The Pasha went on to add that the excesses merited and had received severe condemnation. This was untrue. Actually the troops were given triumphal receptions when they returned to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. In Mosul the Crown Prince, who is now King of Iraq, at a great military review, decorated with his own hands the colours of the troops who had been engaged against the Assyrians. Bekir Sidqi, Hajji Ramadhan, and the other officers concerned were promoted. Bekir Sidqi on his arrival in Baghdad motored through the crowded streets amidst enthusiastic applause, sitting on the right hand of the Prime Minister. However much Iraqis may deplore what occurred—and in private many express a genuine disgust—no one of them has yet stated publicly in Iraq that the Army had behaved itself otherwise than well.

But though the worst massacres of all took place at Simmel, this was not the only place where Assyrians were murdered. The killings at Dohuk have already been described, and many also were shot at and near Zakho. The first reports regarding the number of Assyrians killed were greatly exaggerated; two thousand was a figure often mentioned, and few people, even Iraqis, suggested less than one thousand. Actually, as the result of careful inquiries, I have come to the conclusion that not more than six hundred lost their lives. The great majority of these were peaceful cultivators, who had committed not the smallest offence against the Iraqi Government. Altogether upwards of five hundred and fifty Assyrians were killed by the Army, of whom not more than twenty could, by any stretch of the imagination, be said to have been killed in action. The Kurds, as a whole, behaved considerably better than might have been expected, especially in view of the undoubted encouragement they had received. Only at two places were they guilty of murder, though they did much looting. At a place named Savora the followers of Nisham Agha murdered twelve Assyrians in cold blood. At Qalla Badri, near Dohuk, some Assyrian women were killed and mutilated under atrocious circumstances. Other Assyrians in other places were killed by the Kurds in the course of their robbing and looting, but probably Kurds did not kill more than fifty altogether. On the other hand, several instances were reported of Kurds protecting Assyrian women and children. Mohammed Agha of Germawa, in particular, showed a fine spirit.

The Arab tribes, though intent on loot, did no killing at all. The civil officials, with the exception of Abdul Hamid Dabuni, the Qaimaqam of Zakho, behaved reasonably well under circumstances of extraordinary difficulty, though it is true that some were weak and that in places they were terrorized by the Army. The Qaimaqam of Amadiyah, Majid Beg, kept order in his qodha, where, perhaps, an outbreak was more to be feared than anywhere else. He succeeded in gaining the entire confidence of the Assyrians, who are numerous in that district. The Qaimaqam of Aqra, Zibar, and Rowanduz, were, in easier circumstances, equally successful.

The police were generally quite useless, and this was largely owing to the incompetency, if not worse, shown by the Director-General of Police himself, as before his arrival in Dohuk, the Commandant of Police had made some efforts to maintain order. Nevertheless, the police were guilty of few actual crimes. I heard of two Assyrians being shot by them at Dohuk, but that was all. Even the irregular police, though rather useless, committed no serious excesses other than a little looting. Some of the police inspectors were bullies, but nothing more than that! The sergeant at Simmel was the exception. He was a Kurd and an old Turkish gendarme. He had, no doubt, taken part in many massacres of Armenians and understood the routine. The Assyrian women testify that the other police constables at Simmel did their utmost to help them, though naturally they could not do much. The infamous police sergeant, it may be mentioned, was still at Simmel at the beginning of November 1933. He had taken large sums of money from the Assyrian women, but nothing has been recovered. He is now rich enough to retire if he wants to do so.

Thus ended the first military "operations" of the independent kingdom of Iraq. Had it not been for two things all would have gone well, even after the fighting at Dairabun. The first was the short period when heads were lost in Baghdad. The Arabs, particularly in the Press, are apt to be hot-headed and intolerant on political issues so acute as that of the Assyrians had become. There is no doubt, as has been explained, that the Arabs were afraid of the Assyrians and were anxious to see strong measures taken against them, and intensely relieved when these succeeded, even if most of them were appalled to learn what the Army had done.

The second was the deliberate brutality of the Army, which enabled the strong measures against the Assyrians to succeed in a way and to a degree which not even the most blood-thirsty politician in Baghdad had anticipated. The Iraqi Army's callous brutality can never be forgiven. From the Iraqi point of view it was disastrous, and the Government in Baghdad, bowing to the strength of public opinion, found itself unable to take the one step that would have put it right in the eyes of the civilized world; namely, the punishment of the individuals responsible.

MALIK QAMBAR PARTAKES OF THE SORROW OF THE NATION

Honorable members of our nation - The Lord's Peace: Greeting with a feeble hand, I send my condolences to all of our nation. I am a participant in your sorrow and mourning concerning the killing of one thousand and four hundred men, women, and children, sacrificed like martyrs in Mosul villayet; the land whose soil had been brought into existence with the bones and blood of this nation - from the ancient times until today. We, all together, have the right to weep and conduct mourning in honor of this massacre, this crime which struck like lightening from the sky upon this hopeless people.

Let all of us as one remember those killed. They were the sons and daughters of the people that are the inheritors of Mesopotamia, the land that educated the entire world. Today in the twentieth century they have been uprooted, oppressed, robbed, and tortured. They are orphans wandering in the streets, yearning for bread. Let the leaders awake and weep in bitterness. Let the entire nation shed its tears over its children. Let all of us ask of God, creator of all, to pour mercy into the hearts of the leaders of the nations of the world so that they could find a solution to the plight of these people of ours, constantly withering away under heavy burdens.

With all due reverence, I worship before this sacrifice that has pierced the heart of Assyrianism.

With tears in my eyes and full of sorrow until the day of my death.

Malik Qambar of Jelu
15 October 1933

ملاح محمد عزيز حسن جملة

محمدنا دلت امحلا عزلنا دحز

دحزمنا جانب محمدخيمنا حصحنا مع نمز جدول
ملاح وحمنحنا مع حسزمنا ٨٥ جب جدلجب حصل ميلل
جانلا وانحدحا لجتز دحمنا ونلتز ابحتز جلحسلجب
جبسلا حلاس هجتز لح ولنلا جحصول ابذا جدلخصاس
بيسز للح حصحنلا للبحنمنا دحب لتزحنا وجدا جانا حلاح
ما حي جتز امحل لجس جب. ابحلاح حصا جدلا حل ميلل
حجس وحتجس هاس حا جانا ميلل وانا لجسا يحصلا
جلسلجب نجسا حلاس حنحا جسحين دحس جانا لجسلا
حجتز.

حسحنا حلا حسح نجا هاجس لحب ابلا ميلل وانحجتز

حلاح وحمنحنا مع حسزمنا ٨٥ جب جدلجب حصل ميلل
جانلا وانحدحا لجتز دحمنا ونلتز ابحتز جلحسلجب
جبسلا حلاس هجتز لح ولنلا جحصول ابذا جدلخصاس
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حجس وحتجس هاس حا جانا ميلل وانا لجسا يحصلا
جلسلجب نجسا حلاس حنحا جسحين دحس جانا لجسلا
حجتز.

حسحنا حلا حسح نجا هاجس لحب ابلا ميلل وانحجتز

SEVENTY THOUSAND ASSYRIANS

The following short story was written by William Saroyan, the well-known Armenian-American writer, a short time after the massacre at Simmel. It is interesting because, among other things, it indicates how severely affected the Assyrians were by this latest persecution. While most Assyrians reacted with greater efforts to preserve their national existence, some were overwhelmed by the seeming futility of any action in the face of relentless persecution. The text is reproduced from *The William Saroyan Reader* New York, 1958, pp. 98-106.

I HADN'T had a haireut in forty days and forty nights, and I was beginning to look like several violinists out of work. You know the look: genius gone to pot, and ready to join the Communist Party. We barbarians from Asia Minor are hairy people: when we need a haircut, we *need* a haircut. It was so bad, I had outgrown my only hat. (I am writing a serious story, perhaps one of the most serious I shall ever write. That is why I am being flippant. Readers of Sherwood Anderson will begin to understand what I am saying after a while; they will know that my laughter is rather sad.) I was a young man in need of a haircut, so I went down to Third Street (San Francisco), to the Barber College, for a fifteen-eent haircut.

Third Street, below Howard, is a district; think of the Bowery in New York, Main Street in Los Angeles: think of old men and boys, out of work, hanging around, smoking Bull Durham, talking about the government, waiting for something to turn up, simply waiting. It was a Monday morning in August and a lot of the tramps had come to the shop to brighten up a bit. The Japanese boy who was working over the free chair had a waiting list of eleven; all the other chairs were oeeupied. I sat down and began to wait. Outside, as Hemingway (*The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, Death in the Afternoon, Winner Take Nothing*) would say, haircuts were four bits. I had twenty eents and a half paek of Bull Durham. I rolled a eigarette, handed the pack to one of my eontemporaries who looked in need of nicotine and inhaled the dry smoke, thinking of America, what was going on politieally, eeonomically, spiritually. My contemporary was a boy of sixteen. He looked Iowa; splendid potentially, a solid American, but down, greatly down in the mouth. Little sleep, no ehange of clothes for several days, a little fear, ete. I wanted very much to know his name. A writer is always wanting to get the reality of faees and figures. Iowa said, 'I just got in from Salinas. No work in the

lettuce fields. Going north now, to Portland; try to ship out.' I wanted to tell him how it was with me: rejected story from *Scribner's*, rejected essay from *The Yale Review*, no money for decent cigarettes, worn shoes, old shirts, but I was afraid to make something of my own troubles. A writer's troubles are always boring, a bit unreal. People are apt to feel, *Well, who asked you to write in the first place?* A man must pretend not to be a writer. I said, 'Good luck, north.' Iowa shook his head. 'I know better. Give it a try, anyway. Nothing to lose.' Fine boy, hope he isn't dead, hope he hasn't frozen, mighty cold these days (December, 1933), hope he hasn't gone down; he deserved to live. Iowa, I hope you got work in Portland; I hope you are earning money; I hope you have rented a clean room with a warm bed in it; I hope you are sleeping nights, eating regularly, walking along like a human being, being happy. Iowa, my good wishes are with you. I have said a number of prayers for you. (All the same, I think he is dead by this time. It was in him the day I saw him, the low malicious face of the beast, and at the same time all the theatres in America were showing, over and over again, an animated film-cartoon in which there was a song called 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?', and that's what it amounts to: people with money laughing at the death that is crawling slyly into boys like young Iowa, pretending that it isn't there, laughing in warm theatres. I have prayed for Iowa, and I consider myself a coward. By this time he must be dead, and I am sitting in a small room, talking about him, only talking.)

I began to watch the Japanese boy who was learning to become a barber. He was shaving an old tramp who had a horrible face, one of those faces that emerge from years and years of evasive living, years of being unsettled, of not belonging anywhere, of owning nothing, and the Japanese boy was holding his nose back (his own nose), so that he would not smell the old tramp. A trivial point in a story, a bit of data with no place in a work of art, nevertheless, I put it down. A young writer is always afraid some significant fact may escape him. He is always wanting to put in everything he sees. I wanted to know the name of the Japanese boy. I am profoundly interested in names. I have found that those that are unknown are the most genuine. Take a big name like Andrew Mellon. I was watching the Japanese boy very closely. I wanted to understand from the way he was keeping his sense of smell away from the mouth and nostrils of the old man what he was thinking, how he was feeling. Years ago, when I was

seventeen, I pruned vines in my uncle's vineyard, north of Sanger, in the San Joaquin Valley, and there were several Japanese working with me, Yoshio Enomoto, Hideo Suzuki, Katsumi Sujimoto, and one or two others. These Japanese taught me a few simple phrases, *hello, how are you, fine day, isn't it, good-bye,* and so on. I said in Japanese to the barber student, "How are you?" He said in Japanese, "Very well, thank you." Then, in impeccable English, "Do you speak Japanese? Have you lived in Japan?" I said, "Unfortunately, no. I am able to speak only one or two words. I used to work with Yoshio Enomoto, Hideo Suzuki, Katsumi Sujimoto; do you know them?" He went on with his work, thinking of the names. He seemed to be whispering, "Enomoto, Suzuki, Sujimoto." He said, "Suzuki. Small man?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I know him. He lives in San Jose now. He is married now."

I want you to know that I am deeply interested in what people remember. A young writer goes out to places and talks to people. He tries to find out what they remember. I am not using great material for a short story. Nothing is going to happen in this work. I am not fabricating a fancy plot. I am not creating memorable characters. I am not using a slick style of writing. I am not building up a fine atmosphere. I have no desire to sell this story or any story to *The Saturday Evening Post* or to *Cosmopolitan* or to *Harper's*. I am not trying to compete with the great writers of short stories, men like Sinclair Lewis and Joseph Hergesheimer and Zane Grey, men who really know how to write how to make up stories that will sell. Rich men, men who understand all the rules about plot and character and style and atmosphere and all that stuff. I have no desire for fame. I am not out to win the Pulitzer Prize or the Nobel Prize or any other prize. I am out here in the far West, in San Francisco, in a small room on Carl Street, writing a letter to common people, telling them in simple language things they already know. I am merely making a record, so if I wander around a little, it is because I am in no hurry and because I do not know the rules. If I have any desire at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man. This is a big statement and it sounds a little precious. Generally a man is ashamed to make such a statement. He is afraid sophisticated people will laugh at him. But I don't mind. I'm asking sophisticated people to laugh. That is what sophistication is for. I do not believe in races. I do not believe in governments. I see life as one life at one time, so many millions simultaneously all over the earth. Babies who have not yet been

taught to speak any language are the only race of the earth, the race of man: all the rest is pretence, what we call civilization, hatred, fear, desire for strength. . . . But a baby is a baby. And the way they cry, there you have the brotherhood of man, babies crying. We grow up and we learn the words of a language and we see the universe through the language we know, we do not see it through all languages or through no language at all, through silence, for example, and we isolate ourselves in the language we know. Over here we isolate ourselves in English, or American as Mencken calls it. All the eternal things, in our words. If I want to do anything, I want to speak a more universal language. The heart of man, the unwritten part of man, that which is eternal and common to all races.

Now I am beginning to feel guilty and incompetent. I have used all this language and I am beginning to feel that I have said nothing. This is what drives a young writer out of his head, this feeling that nothing is being said. Any ordinary journalist would have been able to put the whole business into a three-word caption. Man is man, he would have said. Something clever, with any number of implications. But I want to use language that will create a single implication. I want the meaning to be precise, and perhaps that is why the language is so imprecise. I am walking around my subject, the impression I want to make, and I am trying to see it from all angles, so that I will have a whole picture, a picture of wholeness. It is the heart of man that I am trying to imply in this work.

Let me try again: I hadn't had a haircut in a long time and I was beginning to look seedy, so I went down to the Barber College on Third Street, and I sat in a chair. I said, "Leave it full in the back. I have a narrow head and if you do not leave it full in the back, I will go out of this place looking like a horse. Take as much as you like off the top. No lotion, no water, comb it dry." Reading makes a full man, writing a precise one, as you see. This is what happened. It doesn't make much of a story, and the reason is that I have left out the barber, the young man who gave me the haircut.

He was tall, he had a dark serious face, thick lips, on the verge of smiling but melancholy, thick lashes, sad eyes, a large nose. I saw his name on the card that was pasted on the mirror, Theodore Badal. A good name, genuine, a good young man, genuine. Theodore Badal began to work on my head. A good barber never speaks until he has been spoken to, no matter how full his heart may be.

"That name," I said, "Badal. Are you an Armenian?" I am an

Armenian. I have mentioned this before. People look at me and begin to wonder, so I come right out and tell them, "I am an Armenian," I say. Or they read something I have written and begin to wonder, so I let them know. "I am an Armenian," I say. It is a meaningless remark, but they expect me to say it, so I do. I have no idea what it is like to be an Armenian or what it is like to be an Englishman or a Japanese or anything else. I have a faint idea what it is like to be alive. This is the only thing that interests me greatly. This and tennis. I hope some day to write a great philosophical work on tennis, something of the order of *Death in the Afternoon*, but I am aware that I am not yet ready to undertake such a work. I feel that the cultivation of tennis on a large scale among the peoples of the earth will do much to annihilate racial differences, prejudices, hatred, etc. Just as soon as I have perfected my drive and my lob, I hope to begin my outline of this great work. (It may seem to some sophisticated people that I am trying to make fun of Hemingway. I am not. *Death in the Afternoon* is a pretty sound piece of prose. I could never object to it as prose. I cannot even object to it as philosophy. I think it is finer philosophy than that of Will Durant and Walter Pitkin. Even when Hemingway is a fool, he is at least an accurate fool. He tells you what actually takes place and he doesn't allow the speed of an occurrence to make his exposition of it hasty. This is a lot. It is some sort of advancement for literature. To relate leisurely the nature and meaning of that which is very brief in duration.)

"Are you an Armenian?" I asked.

We are a small people and whenever one of us meets another, it is an event. We are always looking around for someone to talk to in our language. Our most ambitious political party estimates that there are nearly two million of us living on the earth, but most of us don't think so. Most of us sit down and take a pencil and a piece of paper and we take one section of the world at a time and imagine how many Armenians at the most are likely to be living in that section and we put the highest number on the paper, and then we go on to another section, India, Russia, Soviet Armenia, Egypt, Italy, Germany, France, America, South America, Australia, and so on, and after we add up our most hopeful figures the total comes to something a little less than a million. Then we start to think how big our families are, how high our birthrate and how low our deathrate (except in times of war when massacres increase the deathrate), and we begin to imagine how rapidly we will increase if we are left

alone a quarter of a century, and we feel pretty happy. We always leave out earthquakes, wars, massacres, famines, etc., and it is a mistake. I remember the Near East Relief drives in my home town. My uncle used to be our orator and he used to make a whole auditorium full of Armenians weep. He was an attorney and he was a great orator. Well, at first the trouble was war. Our people were being destroyed by the enemy. Those who hadn't been killed were homeless and they were starving, *our own flesh and blood*, my uncle said, and we all wept. And we gathered money and sent it to our people in the old country. Then after the war, when I was a bigger boy, we had another Near East Relief drive and my uncle stood on the stage of the Civic Auditorium of my home town and he said, "Thank God this time it is not the enemy, but an earthquake. God has made us suffer. We have worshipped Him through trial and tribulation, through suffering and disease and torture and horror and (my uncle began to weep, began to sob) through the madness of despair, and now He has done this thing, and still we praise Him, still we worship Him. We do not understand the ways of God.' And after the drive I went to my uncle and I said, "Did you mean what you said about God?" And he said, "That was oratory. We've got to raise money. What God? It is nonsense." "And when you cried?" I asked, and my uncle said, "That was real. I could not help it. I had to cry. Why, for God's sake, why must we go through all this God damn hell? What have we done to deserve all this torture? Man won't let us alone. God won't let us alone. Have we done something? Aren't we supposed to be pious people? What is our sin? I am disgusted with God. I am sick of man. The only reason I am willing to get up and talk is that I don't dare keep my mouth shut. I can't bear the thought of more of our people dying. Jesus Christ, have we done something?"

I asked Theodore Badal if he was an Armenian.

He said, "I am an Assyrian."

Well, it was something. They, the Assyrians, came from our part of the world, they had noses like our noses, eyes like our eyes, hearts like our hearts. They had a different language. When they spoke we couldn't understand them, but they were a lot like us. It wasn't quite as pleasing as it would have been if Badal had been an Armenian, but it was something.

"I am an Armenian," I said, "I used to know some Assyrian boys in

my home town, Joseph Sargis, Nito Elia, Tony Saleh. Do you know any of them?"

"Joseph Sargis, I know him," said Badal. "The others I do not know. We lived in New York until five years ago, then we came out west to Turlock. Then we moved up to San Francisco."

"Nito Elia," I said, "is a Captain in the Salvation Army." (I don't want anyone to imagine that I am making anything up, or that I am trying to be funny.) "Tony Saleh," I said, "was killed eight years ago. He was riding a horse and he was thrown and the horse began to run. Tony couldn't get himself free, he was caught by a leg, and the horse ran around and around for a half-hour and then stopped, and when they went up to Tony he was dead. He was fourteen at the time. I used to go to school with him. Tony was a very clever boy, very good at arithmetic."

We began to talk about the Assyrian language and the Armenian language, about the old world, conditions over there, and so on. I was getting a fifteen-cent haircut and I was doing my best to learn something at the same time, to acquire some new truth, some new appreciation of the wonder of life, the dignity of man. (Man has great dignity, do not imagine that he has not.)

Badal said, "I cannot read Assyrian. I was born in the old country, but I want to get over it."

He sounded tired, not physically but spiritually.

"Why?" I said. "Why do you want to get over it?"

"Well," he laughed, "simply because everything is washed up over there." I am repeating his words precisely, putting in nothing of my own. "We were a great people once," he went on. "But that was yesterday, the day before yesterday. Now we are a topic in ancient history. We had a great civilization. They're still admiring it. Now I am in America learning to cut hair. We're washed up as a race, we're through, it's all over, why should I learn to read the language? We have no writers, we have no news—well, there is a little news: once in a while the English encourage the Arabs to massacre us, that is all. It's an old story, we know all about it. The news comes over to us through the Associated Press, anyway."

These remarks were painful to me, an Armenian. I had always felt badly about my own people being destroyed. I had never heard an Assyrian speaking in English about such things. I felt great love for this young fellow. Don't get me wrong. There is a tendency these days to think in terms of pansies whenever a man says that he has

affection for man. I think now that I have affection for all people, even for the enemies of Armenia, whom I have so tactfully not named. Everyone knows who they are. I have nothing against any of them because I think of them as one man living one life at a time, and I know, I am positive, that one man at a time is incapable of the monstrosities performed by mobs. My objection is to mobs only.

"Well," I said, "it is much the same with us. We, too, are old. We still have our church. We still have a few writers, Aharonian, Isahakian, a few others, but it is much the same."

"Yes," said the barber, "I know. We went in for the wrong things. We went in for the simple things, peace and quiet and families. We didn't go in for machinery and conquest and militarism. We didn't go in for diplomacy and deceit and the invention of machine-guns and poison gases. Well, there is no use being disappointed. We had our day, I suppose."

"We are hopeful," I said. "There is no Armenian living who does not still dream of an independent Armenia."

"Dream?" said Badal. "Well, that is something. Assyrians cannot even dream any more. Why, do you know how many of us are left on earth?"

"Two or three million," I suggested.

"Seventy thousand," said Badal. "That is all. Seventy thousand Assyrians in the world, and the Arabs are still killing us. They killed seventy of us in a little uprising last month. There was a small paragraph in the paper. Seventy more of us destroyed. We'll be wiped out before long. My brother is married to an American girl and he has a son. There is no more hope. We are trying to forget Assyria. My father still reads a paper that comes from New York, but he is an old man. He will be dead soon."

Then his voice changed, he ceased speaking as an Assyrian and began to speak as a barber: "Have I taken enough off the top?" he asked.

The rest of the story is pointless. I said *so long* to the young Assyrian and left the shop. I walked across town, four miles, to my room on Carl Street. I thought about the whole business: Assyria and this Assyrian, Theodore Badal, learning to be a barber, the sadness of his voice, the hopelessness of his attitude. This was months ago, in August, but ever since I have been thinking about Assyria, and I have been wanting to say something about Theodore Badal,

a son of an ancient race, himself youthful and alert, yet hopeless. Seventy thousand Assyrians, a mere seventy thousand of that great people, and all the others quiet in death and all the greatness crumbled and ignored, and a young man in America learning to be a barber, and a young man lamenting bitterly the course of history.

Why don't I make up plots and write beautiful love stories that can be made into motion pictures? Why don't I let these unimportant and boring matters go hang? Why don't I try to please the American reading public?

Well, I am an Armenian. Michael Arlen is an Armenian, too. He is pleasing the public. I have great admiration for him, and I think he has perfected a very fine style of writing and all that, but I don't want to write about the people he likes to write about. Those people were dead to begin with. You take Iowa and the Japanese boy and Theodore Badal, the Assyrian; well, they may go down physically, like Iowa, to death, or spiritually, like Badal, to death, but they are of the stuff that is eternal in man and it is this stuff that interests me. You don't find them in bright places, making witty remarks about sex and trivial remarks about art. You find them where I found them, And they will be there forever, the race of man, the part of man, of Assyria as much as of England, that cannot be destroyed, the part that earthquake and war and famine and madness and everything else cannot destroy.

This work is in tribute to Iowa, to Japan, to Assyria, to Armenia, to the race of man everywhere, to the dignity of that race, the brotherhood of things alive. I am not expecting Paramount Pictures to film this work. I am thinking of seventy thousand Assyrians, one at a time, alive, a great race. I am thinking of Theodore Badal, himself seventy thousand Assyrians and seventy million Assyrians, himself Assyria, and man, standing in a barber's shop, in San Francisco, in 1933, and being, still, himself, the whole race.

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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May the Cross of our Lord be the protection of the people of Jesus; the peace of God be with the servants of God, and establish your hearts in the faith of Christ, in tribulation and in ease, in life and in death, now and forever.

The farewell blessing of Mar Shimun Bar Sabbae, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church, before his martyrdom at the hands of the Persians during the great persecutions under Shapur II in 339 A.D.